

## **Brendan Creecy - Untitled Memoir Project**

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### **Chapter Three: Welcome to the Jungle**

There are two incidents from my first day of Junior High that stick out to me. The first happened at lunch. A kid who I thought I was cool with promptly poured milk all over me in an effort to prove himself to the other kids. It was like he was showing his colors in the prison yard or something. One minute we are sitting at a table joking around and eating lunch, the next minute I am crying in the bathroom trying to get milk out my ears. Later that day as I am scrambling to get to class, I see a kid I had met at sixth grade camp. He does a little wave as we cross paths and then he punches me right in the solar plexus, knocking the wind out of me. He does this as if it is some natural instinct, as if he does it all the time. I keel over, waiting for someone to come to my aid as I am surrounded by other kids who have just witnessed this horrible crime. Instead they all start laughing at me. I think it was then that I realized that I was in a war zone and everyone was the enemy. Yes, I still had my allies. Sean and Tim stayed true. But we were outnumbered, and we were sure as hell outgunned.

I think the thing I had the hardest time dealing with in Jr. High was the sudden loss of people who, though I wouldn't have considered close friends, I was on good terms with them. Everyone just suddenly got too cool to even pretend to be civil with me. When I was in sixth grade there was this girl who was very friendly with me. Looking back I think she may have even liked me but back then I was completely terrified of girls. I would have crushes on them but when it came to any sort of action or any kind of interaction at all, I had no idea what to do. This girl lived up the street from me and we started riding our bikes home together every day. She even bought me a cassette of The Party, my favorite band, for my birthday. No one at school besides Sean had ever given me anything. I still have that tape.

So imagine my shock when on the first day of school this girl promptly sits as far away from me as she can on the bus. The most I can get out of her for the next couple weeks is a sheepish hello. This from the girl who used to talk and talk and talk the whole way home while we rode side by side on our bikes. The girl who had invited me to her birthday party that summer, the one I was still kicking myself over not getting to go to because I was at boy scout camp. At our first school dance she had her friend tell me that she didn't want to dance with me. When my dad picked me up I broke down in the car. He took me to Dairy Queen, bought me a Blizzard, and we fed quarters in the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles arcade game until they closed. It still stung every time she got on the bus and walked past my seat but over time it didn't hurt as bad. I had learned my place. Guys like me didn't get to dance with girls or sit next to them on the bus. Guys like me just needed to keep our heads down and stay in the background.

There were a few bright spots in my time at Oak Crest Junior High. The biggest was definitely

band. I had gotten pretty good at sax in the past year in elementary school so I could hold my own even with the 9th graders. The best part about band in 7th grade was that because the school district had cut the music budget so much they could only afford one band teacher for the whole district. Due to this our teacher, Mr. Campbell, was in charge of the concert bands at two junior high schools and the marching and concert bands at two high schools. These schools were about 20 miles or so apart so we had a special block schedule just for the band kids where one day we had band for two hours and the next day we would have P.E. for two hours instead of band since Mr. Campbell was at another school that day. In fact, they had cut the music budget so far down to the bone that the band kids from the other nearby junior high school would come to our school every day for band and P.E.. These kids really had no idea who I was so most of them were really cool.

What was so great about having 2 hours of P.E. every other day? It meant that my P.E. class consisted only of fellow band kids. Now, there were some cool band kids but even the cool band kids were nice people. Band was one of the few safe places in school. It was an asshole free zone. More importantly, it was a bully free zone. Well, for the most part. We'll get to that a little later. They also got a little smarter in Junior High and included my adapted P.E. program as part of my normal P.E. class so I wasn't totally singled out. By that time the only activity I really couldn't do was run due to my asthma but since there were a lot of other kids who couldn't run either it was easier to blend in. My teacher would have me do extra activities sometimes to work on some of my weak areas due to my CP but that was about it. Spending 2 hours every day with the same group of people who weren't total dicks was basically what saved my life in 7th grade. No matter what kind of hell I had been through that day, I knew that after lunch I would be with the band geeks and everything would be OK.

Another thing that kept me going in 7th grade was music. I remember the day everything changed for me when it came to enjoying music. It all started when I did the most poser thing I've ever done in my life. When I was in elementary school, I listened to all the stuff most of the elementary school kids listened to. Mostly pop type stuff like Milli Vanilli, Michael Jackson, and Paula Abdul and a lot of "safe" rap like Vanilla Ice, Kriss Kross, and MC Hammer. I'm pretty sure both of my parents had a better taste in music than me. My dad loved the Beach Boys and listened to a lot of oldies and surf rock as well. My mom listened to a lot of random stuff but it was better than my selection. I remember listening to a lot of Madonna, Whitney Houston, and Mariah Carey before all three went insane with fame on the CD player that cost several hundred 1988 dollars. She even had a Fine Young Cannibals album and I swear I heard some Lou Reed once and some Creedence but maybe I imagined that. However, she did have an Ace of Base tape in her van. I think that might cancel everything else out.

My favorite band above all other bands was a band called The Party. They were members of The Mickey Mouse Club before Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake arrived. They were the original MMC born band and they were freaking awesome. I once saw them play at the Videopolis stage at Disneyland (RIP) and it blew my 10 year old mind. I was an insane MMC fan to the point where I begged my parents for an MMC jacket I probably would have gotten killed in if

I had worn to school for years. I'm pretty sure my parents thought the same thing because they never got me one. I loved The Party so much I started watching The Disney Channel pretty much all the time since at the height of their fame they would play their music videos in between shows quite a bit. I listened to their first album so much I wore the tape out. I bought their second album, which was basically a remix album with two new songs and listened the hell out of that. Yeah, that's right. While it's considered semi-normal now, the idea that a new artist would release a remix album mere months after their debut album was pretty foreign and considered pretty stupid by most. I didn't care.

My first class on my first day of school in 7th grade was English. I sat down behind Danny Donaldson, a kid who personafied punk ass little kid, and I immediately hated everything about Junior High. While not an imposing kid in the least, Danny was a master at verbal insults and for some reason I would just take it. He had been in my class in 5th and 6th grade after being held back a year. There's always one of those kids, isn't there? He once got me sent to the Time Out Room for a week because he was in crutches and took a dive in front of a yard duty, insisting I pushed him. Never mind the fact that I was standing several feet away from him the whole time this happened. Man, what a dick, right?

So there was Danny, in his brand new preppy school clothes on our first day of 7th grade and he just starts laying into me. "Hey Creecy, why don't you tell everybody about your special P.E. class?" "Hey Creecy, why don't you tell them about the time that 4th grader beat you up?" On and on it went. And they ate it up. Something snapped in my brain. I looked at Danny and said in a perfectly calm voice "Shouldn't you be in 8th grade Danny? Oh, that's right, you're so stupid that they wouldn't take you." Oh. Shit. Before things could escalate the teacher finally got up from whatever she was doing that included not paying any attention to the brawl that was about to start in the middle of her classroom. She then passed out index cards and gave us the assignment that would change my life forever.

"I want you to tell me your 3 favorite books, your 3 favorite movies, and your 3 favorite bands," my teacher said. I immediately wrote down The Party, MC Hammer, and C&C Music Factory. I didn't even think twice. I don't even remember what I put for books or movies. Probably a couple Fear Street titles and maybe Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs for books and Ghostbusters, The Goonies, and Troop Beverly Hills for movies. Side note: I just looked up Troop Beverly Hills and it has an 8% on Rotten Tomatoes. That is a crime against humanity and it will not stand.

Our teacher then dropped the bomb. We were to pass our cards to the person behind us and they would read our answers aloud to the class as some kind of sadistic torture exercise or a getting to know you thing. I don't know I may have misheard. I hold on to my card while Danny flicked his card right in my face. I looked at the bands he had written. I had never heard of them before. Pearl Jam, Metallica, and Guns N' Roses. Nope, didn't ring a bell. Remember, this was 1992. I think everyone in 1992 knew who these bands were. Not me. The Party and C&C Music Factory were my world when it came to music. I had missed out on the revolution happening right in front of my face. Shit, even that idiot Danny was wearing a flannel overshirt.

Now, I wasn't a total square. I had heard "Smells Like Teen Spirit" a few times in sixth grade during our dances. Yeah, they played it at those stupid dances. It was the only part of the dance I enjoyed because we would all slamdance and since I was the biggest kid on the floor I got to smash into my tormentors at will and not get in trouble for it. That was pretty much it for my grunge exposure, however. Before I read Danny's card I had no exposure to rock and metal bands like Metallica or GNR. I had no intention of admitting this to the class. I decided to bluff.

I quickly erased all the bands I had listed and replaced them with Pearl Jam, Guns N' Roses, and Nirvana and gave my card to the girl behind me. I knew I had made the right choice when most of the other kids in class had put pretty much the same thing (with a few Ugly Kid Joes and Beastie Boys thrown in) and the one kid who put C&C Music Factory got laughed at until their face turned bright red. Yes, it was a silly thing for me to do, selling out the bands that had kept me company for many years but this was Jr. High and survival was the only thing that really mattered. That fateful notecard also led me to discover one of the greatest outlets in my life, rock music.

I knew I couldn't fake my newfound music fandom for long so that very night I picked up a Rolling Stone while we were at the grocery store. My dad didn't bat an eye at my newfound interest in America's #1 Rock N' Roll Magazine. This was good because my mom would have definitely batted an eye. Probably both eyes. And her fist as she grabbed the magazine out of my hands. That was not the case that evening and I found myself reading articles and reviews that led me down the rabbit hole of a life-long love of music. It also led me to the Columbia House insert that let me choose 12 new cassette tapes of all my new favorite bands. I convinced my dad to write a check using some allowance money I had been saving for baseball cards and 6 to 8 weeks later I was blasting GNR on my Sony Sports Walkman. It blew my 12 year old mind. Those tapes opened my eyes and ears to a world where someone understood my pain and I wasn't a weirdo or a freak. I firmly believe that music was one of the main things that saved my life back then and it never ceases to amuse me that it was all because I lied on my first English assignment.

I'm not sure if it was because of my new found music appreciation or maybe it was just out of sheer tween angst, but around this same time I started writing quite a bit. I had a lot of trouble paying attention in class. When I wasn't scanning my surroundings for potential wet willies, spitballs, or other acts of terror I was writing really crappy poetry in my notebook. I also liked to write out song lyrics of all the new songs I was listening to and try to write my own. Most of them just ended up sounding like really bad Guns N' Roses songs. The writing seemed to help me cope with my crappy school and home life. So of course, that quickly changed.

Bianca was this girl in my band class. She played the flute. For some reason I had a huge crush on her, even though I never talked to her. I think in my whole two years at Oak Crest Jr. High I spoke maybe 5 words to her. She was tall, had blonde hair and true to her name seemed kind of stuck up. But I didn't care. I devised ways to get her to like me. I remember spending an

entire P.E. class trying to hit her with a frisbee. Thankfully I was so uncoordinated that the plan failed. My second plan failed as well, but unfortunately the whole school witnessed it.

My dad knew Jr. High was going pretty rough for me. One day he brought home a small notebook from his office and suggested that I start writing in it, saying it might help me to write down things that were bugging me, maybe write stories or whatever came to my mind. So I started writing. I remember very clearly writing something about how Jr. High made me feel like a lost piece of luggage on a baggage carousel with no place to go, just going around and around. Unwanted, unneeded. I wrote about how I felt like a flower on the wrong side of a garden wall. I think I stole that from a Guns N Roses song. Then I started writing about Bianca. I wrote about how if she only understood me, if she knew about my asthma and my cerebral palsy, and that I didn't want to be fat but that was just how it was, that if she could see the real me, she would know what a nice guy I was. This made me feel good, like it could really happen. So I kept writing. I should have stopped there.

Sometime in the weeks that followed my foray into journaling, I had a vision of Bianca reading my diary and seeing what a good guy I was and throwing herself into my arms. I had this vision while I should have been paying attention to Mrs. Close's grammar lessons in English, just as David Dennis was about to flick my ear for the one millionth time. I hated that guy. He was such a smug little bastard. I wish I could go back in time and yell at my younger self that most of the assholes giving me shit were half my size and would probably go down in one punch. But I just wasn't that guy. I let this little prick walk all over me. Anyways, back to my diary plans. I quickly decided that I would bring the diary to school and "leave" it in the band room, near Bianca's flute so only she would find it. So that's what I did. And I waited. And waited. I went to the band room two days later and my diary was right where I left it.

Now what happened next is kind of a haze, probably because it was so traumatizing that I blocked it out of my mind. I had the diary in my backpack at lunch time. Somehow Sean got a hold of it. Then somehow some other kid got a hold of it and the next thing I knew he was standing in the middle of the quad reading it for anyone who wanted to hear. And boy did they want to hear. I think I spent the next several weeks worth of lunches hiding in the library. Several months later, when I thought the worst of it was over, David Dennis started quoting a passage from my diary during class. Everyone started laughing. I have no idea why I didn't punch that fucker in the face.

Girls were always an area of difficulty in my life. I had been conditioned by my years as the fat kid to only speak when spoken to, to keep my head down, and to realize that I was not good enough for anyone. This couldn't be more clear in the way I dealt with girls as the Bianca story just showed you. As a gay man, a lot of people ask me if I always knew I was gay. I don't think I always knew, but I had a pretty good idea from a very young age. However, that doesn't mean I accepted this fact. In fact, it was quite the opposite. I spent many, many years fighting who I was. This really started coming to fruition in Junior High. I had convinced myself that I needed to

have a girlfriend in order to be normal. Never mind the fact that deep down I really wasn't into girls and the fact that I was completely in the dark on how relationships or flirting or anything like that worked. I had no problems making friends with girls. Being the fat kid made that easy I think because most girls saw me as a non-threat. Which was why the moment I tried to go beyond friendship with any girl, things went south really quick. As painful as the Bianca thing was, it would get much worse.

Sean and I met this girl Erica who was a total tomboy. For some reason she liked hanging out with us. Not outside of school, mind you, but she would eat with us in our little corner away from everyone else. Sean liked her, and I kind of liked her too, but both of us had no idea what to do around girls so maybe that's how it worked out so perfectly. We were both too stupid and awkward to fuck up the friendship with her. Anyways, Erica had this friend named Gina who I really had the hots for for whatever reason. She would sometimes come eat with us, but she was borderline cool, so it was a big deal when she did. She wrote me a note once and in it she said she liked me. I think it even contained the lyrics of a Whitney Houston song though I am not sure which one. So I asked her if she would come with me to see *A Far Off Place* at the movies. I had already gotten pre-approval for this from my dad, who agreed that when we got to the movies, he and my brother would drop me off and then they would come in separately and sit away from us in the theater. So I gave her this gushy love note inviting her to the movies, she said yes, and I suddenly was going to be going on my first date. I was beyond excited. I listened to easy listening songs on the radio instead of the usual metal and hard rock, I was so over the moon. The big day came, Gina ate lunch with us, and it was awesome. She hugged me!

That night we got to the movie theater and my dad dropped me off in front of the theater and I waited for Gina. And waited. And waited. And waited. That walk into *A Far Off Place* was the longest of my life to that point. I sat next to my dad and did my best to hold back the tears. To this day, I kind of hate Reese Witherspoon because of what happened that night. But it does not end there. That Monday, I got to school, and somehow the majority of the school had either heard about or read the love note I wrote to Gina. I wanted to run up to her at the cool table and scream at her, ask her why, plead for an answer. But I couldn't bring myself to do it. My spirit had been so broken by that point, that I chalked it up to my own stupidity. I should have known this would happen. This is what I get for thinking that a pretty, semi-popular girl would go out with me. I deserved to be put in my place like this. It took quite a long time to reverse that thinking in my head. In fact, I didn't go out on a proper date with a girl for another five years. Yeah, five years. If you're doing the math at home, my first date wasn't until my freshman year of college.

Needless to say, relationships were not my strong suit. Thankfully, I had music and TV to console me. The next revelation in my musical journey was the jukebox at the Round Table Pizza by our school. Mr. Campbell, our band teacher, gave out points if we did a good job and didn't act out too much during class. Unlike most point systems, this was for the whole class. It was pretty genius. As soon as he told us when we got to a hundred points we would have a pizza party after school at Round Table everybody was sold. We made sure we were all ready when Mr. Campbell lifted his hand for us to get in position. We kept the horseplay to a minimum.

We got our first pizza party in less than a month. Did I mention how awesome band was?

The legendary jukebox at Round Table played 45 RPM records. But these weren't your mom's 45's. Out of that jukebox came sweet sounds that would change my life. Metallica, Ugly Kid Joe, Pearl Jam, Guns N' Roses, Soundgarden, Nirvana, Duran Duran, The Cure, Blind Melon, Faith No More. These were songs of freedom for me. They allowed me to escape. I remember hearing "Ordinary World" for the first time and just feeling so great. Melancholy, but great. Yes, I already had a few tapes at home but there was something magical about those records. My sadness would melt away as I sang along with several of my band friends to "Cat's in the Cradle" and "Alive." Add to all this all the pizza we could eat and some Street Fighter 2 to boot and it was easy to forget the source of my pain just a few blocks away and my empty home waiting for me later that evening.

Aside from band and my new found love of music, I had very little to be happy about. Elementary school was small and insulated enough that I had a small handful of tormentors and most of the other kids were indifferent. Junior high seemed to be this endless wasteland of unfriendlies. A complete stranger would call me Piggy or some other name as they were walking by. Random 9th graders would shove me into the wall. Having 6 classes a day meant 6 new groups of kids who would torment me in new and exciting ways each class period. Then there was lunch. Imagine being set loose in a wild animal park with a few hundred hungry animals and it is feeding time. That was lunch time at Oak Crest. Lunch wasn't as supervised as it was in elementary school. I had to be very aware of my surroundings as bullies and other random hoodlums would simply prowl around looking for weak kids to go after. After several run ins with various jerks, Sean and I stopped eating at the lunch tables and found a far off corner where we couldn't be ambushed. If Sean wasn't there or things got bad, I would hide in the library, just like I did in elementary school. Tim spent his lunches hiding out in the special ed room most of the time. I envied him because he could eat in there. I would wolf down my lunch and quickly retreat into the sanctuary of the library, keeping my head down, trying not to make eye contact with any would-be predators. Sometimes it would work, other times it would not.

Due to being surrounded by threats both perceived and real, I began to draw more and more inside myself. I built up walls that took years to be torn down. Some of them I am still working on removing completely. For a long time I had a very difficult time trusting other people. Even after I escaped Oak Crest I was convinced everyone around me hated me and was only pretending to be my friend. Because of this I probably missed out on some opportunities and friendships. I guess that's the big consequence of living a life where you're afraid of everyone and everything. I think I've pretty much overcome that thankfully. Some people never do. I still have these moments every now and then where a situation will put me right back in that mindset and I will withdraw from everything. Addressing my anxiety and depression has helped with this a lot but there are still those days. I'm not sure they will ever completely go away.

My parents split up again towards the end of seventh grade. This time my dad moved out. That really sucked. My dad got an apartment about 15 minutes away. He would pick me up every

morning and drive me to school. That is the kind of father he was. We spent most weekends with him but it still never felt like enough time. I missed him terribly when I was in our house. It felt wrong without him there. It felt empty.